

MIGRATING PEDAGOGIES:

ENCOUNTERING IMMIGRANT PUPILS THROUGH MOVEMENT AND DANCE

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Abstract

In this article the author reflects on her experiences as a visiting dance teacher for preparatory class pupils at a public school in Finland. Preparatory classes are intended for children who have arrived in Finland recently from another country, and who do not yet know Finnish language. As part of a broad research initiative, *Art as public service: Strategic steps towards equality*, the author entered the school with an intention to approach language learning through movement and dance, an approach aligned with the notion of embodied learning. As a broader aim, she wanted to understand how movement and dance can support intersubjective understanding, social interaction and communication especially in groups where the members come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and do not have a common spoken language. The reality of the school context, and the pupils' life situations, however, posited unforeseen challenges to these aims. The author approaches this inquiry into the complex social reality through autoethnographical, performative writing. She unravels her observations, reflections and embodied experiences. Through revealing her experiences and vulnerable moments she attempts to illuminate others' vulnerabilities, and incite discussion on embodied sensibilities

that may help us understand the challenges of “migrating” pedagogies; a notion that is connected to critical, dialogical pedagogy, ecojustice education, and socio-material approaches to education. She concludes that embodied interaction, when creatively and carefully nurtured, may at least temporarily generate a space where words are not needed for intersubjective understanding and dialogue, and where something new may emerge. For her, these moments give hope and trust in the possibility of migration towards a place called dance.

Keywords: embodied learning, dance education, public school, autoethnography, performative writing

PROLOGUE

I arrive at the school, having taken the train from the city and then, a short walk from the station. I stop at the entrance to read announcements for extracurricular activities. There seems to be many kinds of activities and clubs for pupils to choose from. Then I read pupils' writings on their future hopes, collected on a large sheet. The hopes are expressed in short phrases. Many pupils hope for a pet: a dog, a cat. Many mention games, computers, technology. Some dream about travelling abroad, also friends seem important. These are familiar things ... it seems that pupils' life world revolves around everyday, familiar and safe issues, as it should.

I continue to the teachers' lounge. I am early, it is still very quiet there because the recess has not started. One by one teachers drift in. I don't know anyone yet and no one seems to pay any attention to me. The atmosphere is hassle-free, and it seems that many teachers have their own places here.

I meet Ada, the music teacher, and she takes me to the classroom. There are pupils here and there along the corridors. Many sit by the walls, looking at their cell phones, heads bent down.

ENTERING MARYHILL SCHOOL

This article is based on my experiences as a visiting dance teacher for preparatory class pupils at a public school that is located in the city of Vantaa, the most multicultural city in Finland.* The account above depicts my arrival at Maryhill school (a pseudonym, as all the names in this article), a public school with about 800 students, grades 1-9, and about 100 staff, including about 60 teachers. Along with regular and special needs instruction groups, the school has two preparatory classes.

* Vantaa has a population of about 220 000. Out of its inhabitants, 16.6% (36.000) speak other languages than Finnish. Helsinki, the capital of Finland and the very close neighbor of Vantaa has about 640 000 inhabitants, and almost the same percentage of immigrants (16.3%).

Preparatory classes are intended for children who have arrived in Finland recently from another country, and who do not know Finnish language. The purpose is that they will learn enough Finnish so that they can continue their education within regular class instruction. As part of a broad research initiative, *Art as public service: Strategic steps towards equality*,* I entered the school with an intention to approach language learning through movement and dance. This pedagogical approach is aligned with the notion of embodied learning (e.g., Anttila, 2013, 2015; Katz, 2013; Svendler Nielsen, 2015). In Finland, teaching dance artists affiliated with the Zodiak Center for New Dance have applied and further developed a so-called kinesthetic language workshop method for many years. The funder of this research project emphasizes interaction with non-academic institutions and stakeholders, and collaboration with Zodiak's TALK-project** was an important element of this intervention.

I first entered the school in August 2016 with only a very vague plan on how to proceed concretely. The plan, on paper, was wide-ranging and ambitious. Our “Arts@School” research team, one of six teams of the ArtsEqual research initiative, had designed several “arts-infused” pedagogical interventions. According to the plan the aim of this particular intervention, entitled *Embodied dialogue: Encountering the Other in/through movement and dance* is to investigate how movement and dance can support intersubjective understanding, social interaction and communication especially in groups where the members come from diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds and do not have a common spoken language. Another aim is to theorize the underlying phenomena in relation to what emerges at a bodily and verbal level especially focusing on how intersubjective understanding and conceptual thought may have an embodied origin, and connect this discussion to performativity and the notion of performing difference.

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For more information, see <http://www.zodiak.fi/en/talk>.

The *Embodied dialogue* intervention was to focus on nonverbal and verbal communication, encountering others and learning Finnish as a second language. The emphasis was to be on collaboration, working in pairs and small groups, fostering a safe learning environment, where gestures, facial expressions and movements may lead to contact, touch, encounter, seeing the other, being seen; gradually towards verbal interaction, and ideas shared through voice and verbal language. The plan also states that issues related to gender in relation to, e.g., touch, would be carefully and sensitively attended to in these multicultural contexts. These aims and ideas concur with the broader aims of ArtsEqual research initiative that commenced in 2015 (see artsequal.fi/en).

EQUALITY AS A STARTING POINT FOR ARTS EDUCATION

The ArtsEqual research initiative is coordinated by the University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland, and with its six research teams, attempts at finding solutions to problems that arise from growing inequalities within the Finnish society. The Arts@School team focuses on questions related to inclusion, participation and equality in Finnish schools from the viewpoint of arts education. The team looks for ways to foster every student's possibility to participate in arts education and learn through the arts in support for his/her learning, school engagement, and well-being. We also ask, as the entire ArtsEqual group, what if equality is the starting point, instead of the end point, for arts education. This entails that each pupil is considered gifted and capable, and should have equal opportunities for developing his/her talents and fulfilling his/her dreams. It also entails that every form of talent is equally valued.

Arts@School researchers are also practitioners in arts education. In collaboration with teachers and students, we have designed and carried out several interventions in five Finnish public schools. Ada, the music teacher, is also a member of the team, and Maryhill school hosts several interventions. Through these practical, collaborative "learning laboratories" pupils, teachers and researchers were to search for new possibilities for learning and well-being at Finnish schools.

The reality of the school context, and the pupils' life situations, however, has posited unforeseen challenges to these aims. This article depicts this reality from my personal perspective, starting from realizing that "*I had forgotten what 7th graders are like*" and finding out that the teacher with whom I was supposed to collaborate most, left the school after only one month of employment there, to being "quite baffled because now I do not have a physical space for the session nor information on who, if anyone, is coming". These, and many other observations and experiences form the core of my enquiry. Through joining them together and then sharing this narrative that covers one academic year, my intention is to shed light on practices and conditions that often remain unnoticed. Before embarking on this journey, however, I present background for this research project.

EMBODIMENT, LEARNING, AND EQUALITY

The aims of ArtsEqual research initiative, and the Arts@School research team, by and large stem from and concur with my earlier research and interests. Equality is, of course, one of the core values and concepts in critical and dialogical pedagogy, a central theoretical framework in my doctoral dissertation (Anttila, 2003a) and several subsequent publications (Anttila, 2008, 2015). In my doctoral lecture, I contemplated that,

... one the most rewarding and intriguing tasks in this research project has been transforming the abstract and ideological ideas of dialogue into an embodied practice in the field of dance. In this process it has been extremely inspiring to see how dialogue, itself, is connected to nonverbal, bodily existence, and how many possibilities for dialogue dance as a substance carries. In its essence, dialogue is a prelinguistic, bodily and concrete happening that streams out from a body to another body. (Anttila, 2003b, para 18)

Subsequently, I have been increasingly interested in developing the notions of embodied learning and dialogue further. The growing scholarly field of embodied cognition, especially the enactive approach, is a key framework for conceptualizing embodied learning. Enaction sees the lived body as a system that encompasses the

interaction between body and mind, body and environment, and environment and mind, and focuses on embodied social interaction as mutual participatory sense-making. The enactive approach focuses on processes that “bring about our experience of the world, including our sense of self ... and extend across complex couplings of the brain, the rest of the body, and the environment” (Thompson, 2016, p. xx).

Enactivism seems also closely allied with contemporary approaches to educational research referred to as sociomaterial theories (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011). These approaches consider education and learning as systemic processes that take place within webs of entangled human and non-human action and knowledge. Human beings are fully nested within and interconnected with the elements of the systems in which they are part. Humans, thus, are not autonomous, sovereign agents of their learning and knowledge construction. Knowledge, learning and action are understood as continuous invention and exploration, knowledge performs itself into existence, and learning is defined as expanded possibilities for action (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk, 2011).

These views resonate with my lived experiences as a dancer, dance educator, and dance scholar, and support me in articulating and understanding my deep interest in embodied learning. Embodied learning, as I see it, takes place within the entire human being and between human beings, and in connection with the social and physical reality. In order for learning to be experienced at an embodied level, and intentionally framed to be so, embodied activity needs to take place within and among learners. Embodied activity refers to both actual movement and inner bodily sensations, experiences and physiological changes. In embodied learning, non-symbolic sensations generated by physical action and multisensory engagement become interconnected with symbolic knowing, and lead towards complex meaning-making processes within the social and cultural world (Anttila, 2015).

The element of performance, or performativity adds another layer to this discussion. It is my view that *performing is a significant element of (human) life that should be seen as a continuum where everyday life and art are interwoven. Thus, performing arts and*

embodied, performative actions should be key elements in learning and education. A collaborative approach towards dance education incorporates embodied action with negotiation, decision-making, opinion-stating, and demonstrating own ideas not only in words, but also with the entire body. This process can be seen as a series of embodied, performative acts that alternate with acts of receiving and responding to others' performative acts. Based on my previous research projects (e.g., Anttila, 2008, 2013, 2015), I propose that experiences related to performing, coupled with witnessing others performing creates space for a shared experience, and that young people have a strong desire for creative collaboration with peers and learning through embodied action. Thus, dance may enhance the sense of community and that, in turn, may generate a safe environment for performing difference, and for an education that celebrates difference. This, again, may create a path towards greater appreciation of diversity, and pave way towards agency, identity, and community (Bhabha, 1994; Martusewicz et al., 2015).

STEPS, TURNS, AND SLIPPERY SURFACES

Theory is seductive and sometimes deceptive. Through theoretical writing it is possible to depict how things ideally are, how they might or should be, by using words in a way that tempt, words that ring true, meaningful, and that succeed in making a coherent, logical argument. Instead, according to Ronald Pelias (2005), performative writing “attempts to keep the complexities of human life intact” (p. 418). Acknowledging that everyday experience does not equal scholarship, performative writing seeks to engage and evoke, instead of report and describe; thus, the performative writer, as an artist, shapes experiences into texts that move and matter. Performative writers see the world composed of multiple realities and privilege dialogue, the fragmentary, the uncertain, and “do not believe that argument is an opportunity to win, to impose their logic on others, to colonize ... [performative writing] creates a space where others might see themselves” (Pelias 2005, p. 419). Performative writing seeks to create resonance through words performing, dancing on pages, and through constructing stories that can be trusted and used, than posing truths. The criteria of validity for research based on performative writing stem from, e.g.,

verisimilitude, resonance, and aesthetic merit (Ellis 2004; Richardson 2000).

Autoethnographical writing is closely allied with performative writing. According to Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000) autoethnography displays multiple layers of consciousness as the researcher looks both outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience, and inward, exposing a vulnerable self. Autoethnographical texts are composed of concrete action, dialogue, emotion and embodiment (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In my earlier work (Anttila, 2003a; 2015) this genre of writing has been a means for me to unravel my embodied experiences and place them in dialogue with the Others with whom I have interacted, and to expose my vulnerability. I have been intrigued by the shift of focus from personal to cultural, and how that shift may blur distinctions between them. Thus, personal becomes political, and vice versa. Exposing my vulnerabilities is a way to incite dialogue about complex social realities and experiences of failure, loss and not-knowing as something that human beings – including educators and researchers– inevitably face, but may find difficult to share. Through a heightened embodied sensibility I attempt to deepen understanding on the challenges of migrating pedagogies; a notion that is connected to critical, dialogical pedagogy, EcoJustice Education, and socio-material approaches to education (Anttila, 2008; Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011; Freire 1972; Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2011). I will return to this notion in the closing section of this article.

My inquiry into “migrating pedagogies” is based on experiential accounts that I have written after visiting Maryhill school on three occasions during fall 2016, and on my reflections on a session led by a dance educator/artist, Ira, from Zodiak Center for New Dance. While she was the main facilitator of the session, I was free to film, following loosely Charlotte Svendler Nielsen’s (2012) approach on videographic participation. After participating in that session, I viewed it and returned to my experiences and observations, and reflected on them by writing. I will tie these accounts together by narrating, chaining together events that lead from one session to another.

IN THE BIG GYM

The first actual meeting with Maryhill school pupils took place on August 18, 2016. After meeting and discussing with school teachers, we had decided that I will lead one part of a day where all seventh graders of the school, as well as the preparatory class for upper grades (P2), will get to know each other through various games and activities. The instruction groups were mixed so that everyone would meet as many pupils across groups. The P2 class included 13 pupils and was split and mixed with regular instruction groups.

In my “station” the idea was to introduce some Finnish words to the preparatory class pupils through movement games and dance, so that pupils from regular classes would be actively involved in “teaching” Finnish language and at the same time, getting to know each other. Through this meeting the intention was to support their future interactions during, e.g., recess and thus, to foster interaction between groups and individuals from different groups. During the day, I led a 20 minute session to six groups of about 25 seventh graders.

I had forgotten how 7th graders are. Or, they have changed. Or, maybe I have never really entered the world of pupils of this age.

First observation: everyone is really different. But they all seem to want to be alike. Very few seem to want to stand out. The ones who want, do it by fooling around—especially boys. Within the group of 150 pupils there are tall ones, short ones, thin ones, chubby ones. There are glasses, hair that hides the eyes, hoods. Athletic ones, bookish ones. There are some girls with scarves, and one girl in an all black gown. Ones with makeup, without makeup. Most of the girls seem quiet and shy, a few seem more open.

The atmosphere is reserved. Arms do not rise, steps are cautious. Eye contact seems difficult. Many seem to rather focus on the floor so that they would not be encountered. The voices are weak, it is difficult to hear their names.

The session started with a name game with a ball. Sitting on the floor in a circle, the ball was to be rolled from one pupil to another, simultaneously saying “*My name is so and so, what is your name?*” Then, we stood up, throwing the ball to one another, simultaneously counting the number of throws. Every time the ball fell to the floor, the counting had to start from one again. The purpose was to get as many throws without dropping the ball, and thus, focus on a common goal and at the same time, learn numbers in Finnish by repetition and connected physical activity.

A moment of flow in one group, when we get up to 47. What happened here? Suddenly, like magic, everyone had their focus on the ball. It almost felt like time had stopped and everything in the background faded. There was only the ball, and the growing number.

I became sweaty.

One girl, dressed in a long gown that hid her entire body, seemed like enjoying the rhythm. Her body inside the gown seemed alive and flowing, mobile and vibrant.

I had been instructed to be careful with physical contact between girls and boys because of cultural codes and norms that for some pupils, especially newcomers to Finland, may struggle with. As my pedagogical practice emphasizes contact and interaction in all manners, including touch, I felt somewhat handicapped. I had to find ways to lead the activity. The lack of common spoken language did not make this task any easier.

Two girls in one group were all alone when we moved in space. No one made contact with them. This made me feel sad. It hurts me to see lonely pupils in a big crowd.

Afterwards I noticed that my diaphragm was cramping. It took a while until it eased off. I must have been tense. However, somehow, I enjoy these situations and think that I would like to create dances with these pupils ...

IN THE CLASSROOM

On September 22, 2016, I was to spend the whole day at the school, to get to know the P2 class better. There was no clear plan what my role would be, and whether or not I would lead some movement/dance activities.

Pupils stand up and greet me and the classroom teacher, Ina. The atmosphere is sleepy. It is quiet, Ina is very gentle and calm. She instructs the pupils to open their books, page so and so. Reading aloud, one by one focusing down at their own book. The voices are quiet, the articulation is blurred. Heads are bent down.

Then assignments based on the reading, assignments that consist of multiple choices, for example. I remember my own school experiences when I did not understand the idea behind multiple choice assignments. One pupil seems to be as confused as I was back then.

The next class is taught by P1 teacher, Mea. She speaks louder and faster, and the pupils have woken up, I see facial expressions, gestures, movements, I hear more sounds. Again, reading and assignments.

The main focus of preparatory class instruction is teaching and learning Finnish as second language. The classes I witnessed were based on reading textbooks, silently and aloud, written assignments based on reading comprehension, and going through the assignments. At times pupils leave the class, others enter, since they are on different skill levels in, for example, math. Some may take a class with regular instruction groups. The composition of the group changes constantly. Also, new pupils arrive at any time during the year, as they arrive to Finland. Pupils are transferred to regular instruction groups as soon as they know enough Finnish, at the latest after having spent one year at a preparatory class.

During lunch we start to plan the rest of the day: would I lead a movement session or not, and if yes, where and when? Mea asks if the P1 class could join; I agree, spontaneously. Then, an incident interrupts our planning. A P2 pupil had apparently hit another pupil. Mea has to take charge of both classes. Luckily,

we soon find out that it was an accident. Our interrupted planning continues hastily during recess. We agree to go to music class with both preparatory classes. Ada will join us. I accept the challenge without having a clear plan on how to lead a movement session to more than 20 pupils, aged about 8-17, coming from at least 10 different countries.

IN THE MUSIC CLASSROOM

I gather all pupils in a circle, we sit on the floor. We start naming and tapping the body parts. Then verbs: reach, bend, turn ... right, left, and so on. Different ways to turn: on the knees, bottom, left and right.

Everyone participates until two boys collide. One is the same boy who had accidentally hit a pupil during lunch. The other one, Max, withdraws, annoyed. He sits out for the rest of the session.

We continue standing up: turning on one leg, left, right – bending, reaching, shaking. Then Ada accompanies with piano: freezing when the music stops. I throw myself in, I try to encourage pupils to let go and goof around a bit. We finish with a bit of stretching.

I became sweaty.

Afterwards, I wondered if this was a typical day for preparatory classes. Different pupils, teachers, incidents, negotiations, changing plans. Reading aloud, assignments based on reading, more reading. Books, pens, writing, sitting. Collisions, conflicts, agreements.

Soon after this visit I heard that Ina had left the school. My plan had been to focus on working with this class, because in my previous research (Anttila, 2013, 2015) engaging upper grade pupils in active learning, embodied interaction remains a challenge. I understood that a new teacher cannot become involved in a research intervention right away. After a month or so, I contacted the school again, asking if the new teacher, Nina, would be interested in this intervention. I found out that while she was open to this idea, Mea was very eager to continue. Finally, we found a day, November 30, when I could come and work with both groups: first, separately and then combined. In our email

exchanges I was warned that “*you might need to be flexible about the spaces*”.

IN THE SMALL GYM

Today I have a bag full of stuff with me: instruments, paper roll, crayons. I have plans, I am prepared! Ada takes me to the small gym. I have not been here before. A nice space, not so huge as the big gym. A bit bleak, though. There is no CD-player.

I wait for at least 15 minutes, nobody comes. I text Ada. Soon thereafter they come. Mea says that first, they did not find the gym and then, on their way, a girl had fallen on the stairs and hurt her lip.

I ask what they remember from the last time we met. Max shows the turns. We do some turns again. Then we do the name game with a ball. Mea interrupts every time someone makes a mistake. I became distracted and try to encourage everyone as much as possible. We do a second game on “Where are you from?” “I am from ...”.

We do a drawing task with partners – drawing body outlines. Rex, new to the class, does not want to participate. He hides behind a mattress. All others become very engaged in this and time flies. Rex wants to do the task alone, I help him to get started. He also becomes very engaged, drawing and colouring many details, some with disturbing content. Mea shakes her head in disapproval. Since we started late, we could not finish and the class is over. Others leave, but this Rex stays, he wants to finish. I praise the drawing, trying to make contact with him. I tap him on the shoulder and say, have a nice day. Suddenly, he hugs me and stays there for a while.

I am touched and bewildered. What might be going on in his world? He does not speak or understand any Finnish. I wish I understood, knew more.

The pupils come from Estonia, Russia, Kosovo, Albania, Turkey, Afganistan. The reasons for their migration to Finland vary, not all are refugees. There are many siblings, placed according to their age either in a P1 class (grades 1-6), or P2 (grades 7-9).

I decide that we will not do this drawing task with P2 because it is too time consuming. I quickly make a new plan. The class arrives, reluctantly. There are new pupils and a new teacher. Pupils from around the world, some do not speak any Finnish yet.

Name game, “where you are from” game, number game with ball. We get to 99! This perks them up a bit. Various activities with different objects. My intention is to encourage embodied interaction and contact without physical contact, but pupils are still very hesitant and move sluggishly. Nina and a classroom assistant sit and talk quietly on a bench by the wall, not paying attention to the class and I become a bit discouraged.

When the class is almost over one girl asks for music. I can't play music because there is no CD-player, I regret it but she appears offended: “You do not hear us...” she says in Finnish. During recess I text Ada to ask if we can get a CD-player.

Then I find out that the space is not free for us to use, after all. The plan was to work here all together. But when P2 left, Nina said that she does not think that they will come. I am quite baffled because now I do not have a physical space for the session nor information on who, if anyone, is coming.

Soon both classes and Mea, Nina, Ada and the assistant are at the door. We all go together to search for a free space. Nina walks ahead, with two P1 class girls holding her hands. We wander around the school as a compliant flock. The will to find a space, to move and dance seems to be strong. We peek into the auditorium, it is not free. We consider even the corridors and stairs but that would be too dangerous; one pupil has just fallen and hurt her lip. I notice her now, her lip is all swollen.

IN THE CLASSROOM, II

We decide to go to P2 classroom. Suddenly everyone seems enthusiastic, they say that everything has been fun. Each teacher comes up with some games and activities. In the end, we create a small dance by suggesting movements, directions and then, throwing the dice for deciding how many times we do each

movement. We all dance together this small circle dance in a very small space.

With this, the fall semester came to close on a positive note. I was hopeful that the intervention can be scheduled more systematically from now on, and that we can now begin collaboration with Zodiak's teaching artists. Thus, negotiations involving Ada, Nina, Mea, other teachers from Maryhill school, three dance artists from Zodiak, and myself began. The plan was also to offer professional development training on TALK -workshop method for interested school teachers. Scheduling this, however, became extremely difficult. In early December, 2016, I initiated an email discussion for planning the schedules and content of the workshop. Three months later, after more than 30 emails that add up to 14 printed pages, we had not managed to find a time for a teachers' workshop. Luckily, we found three slots for P1, and another three slots to P2. These workshops took part between March 8 and April 26, 2017. The following account is based on the second to last workshop with P1 class that I was able to videotape, and thus, revisit and reflect on more closely. This session took place on April 19, 2017.

IN THE SMALL GYM, II

Pupils fill the space with joyful movement and sound, goofing around. One boy turns around on his bottom, others, including Max and Rex, join. Sliding on knees, tummies; cartwheels, teacher hollering. The assistant takes Rex to another classroom.

Ira, the dance teacher has put music on. She initiates a gathering nonverbally, gesturing to invite everyone to the circle. Then, she leads simple warm-up movements, pupils follow each in their own way. Restless, but lively, there is laughter. Max is extremely energetic. He swirls and turns, seems like he enjoys the movement. I hear many languages: Finnish, Russian, Estonian, English.

The session continues with similar games that I had led, then with a composition task based on own movements, numbers and body parts with a partner, and then, a statue game. The pupils seemed enthusiastic about their possibility to move, as I have witnessed so many times before (e.g. Anttila, 2003, 2013). Everyone takes part, but in their own

way. Especially the boys goof around. This is also very familiar to me. However, it feels comforting to see that the pupils do not seem to have obstacles in terms of moving, the floor, and the others.

“If you are up, the next statue is down”. Far, near, up and near” ... “closer, closer, even closer, everyone here!” The pupils rush towards Ida, bursting enthusiasm. “Even closer, even closer!” Giggles.

Here, I saw embodied interaction taking place. This moment brought my vision to life; this is what I want to foster. Embodiment, joy, encounter, energy. Life, togetherness. Living together. In this moment many values and aims became crystallized and realized, concretely and metaphorically.

Then, walking around and stopping. When one stops, everyone stops... up, down, then running. “Where are you?” Pupils respond to the question in relation to space and others. A big statue, small statue – bigger, smaller, biggest, smallest.

The session ends in a circle, or cluster. Ira praises the pupils and announces that we will continue in the auditorium after lunch. Someone yells, “jee” and they run out.

IN THE AUDITORIUM

The auditorium has a stage and rising seating. First activity was based on an idea on entering the stage and thus, becoming a performer. Ira patiently instructed how to walk up the stairs on to the stage, and then, each pupil performed their own movement, saying their name at the same time. *Rex is not participating, he is, again, taken to another classroom.*

Then, in two groups, they performed the compositions that had been created in the small gym. This performance began with introduction: own movement and name, one at a time. Little by little, the pupils became more courageous. *Everyone is different, and here, they are able to perform their difference, their uniqueness.*

The second part of the workshop on the auditorium stage consisted of a movement improvisation, based on the elements from previous activities: different statues, walking, and running. Ira put on slow

music. My initial thought was *what may come of this, so many options, too little space to run...?* I also wondered about the choice of music: *will they be able to concentrate?*

At first, pupils wander around, but everybody is taking part. Then, a girl performs an “arabesque” right on the edge of the stage. A few other pupils follow her. Another girl touches her gently. The music is gentle and soft. Ira performs a low statue, Max performs “an arabesque” very close to her. He continues with dives to the floor, then reaches towards the audience. This “reaching” movement theme goes on. Max and Ira make a statue together.

Music becomes faster. Girls make statues on the edge of the stage, making contact with an imaginary audience. Max reaches towards Ira who is in a low statue, and balances his arabesque statue by holding onto her head. Meanwhile, others seem to be engaged in their own movement ideas. Leaps, slides, formations, shapes... They are reacting to others’ statues and movements. Then, Max and Ira start a duet, where Max is very active, initiating the changes of weight. After a while Ida begins to bring this improvisation event to the end, and invites everyone closeby. New contacts happen. A cluster, close to the floor. Everyone is still doing their own thing, somehow connected to each other.

The myth about physical contact being difficult was becoming dissolved here. The borders between gender and ethnicity were being overcome. *We are all just humans, being together, living together. A teacher and a pupil, a woman and a boy interact as equal partners in art.* Ira’s unconditional trust in movement, embodiment, and flow fostered these embodied encounters, *embodied dialogue*. When the teacher’s relationship to the pupils’, own body, embodiment and movement is direct and strong, the pupils trust her and the situation, and throw themselves in. Thus, based on small elements, encounters in movement and art became possible, and everyone had a chance *to perform difference*, to explore the limits of their embodied expressivity.

MIGRATING TOWARDS DANCE

During this year at Maryhill school I found myself and the pupils migrating along school corridors looking for space for dance. As dance is not included in the national core curriculum in Finland, the material conditions for dance education at schools are inadequate, to say the least. Material conditions correspond with the allocation of time for dance. I struggled with scheduling, and when time was set, the changing circumstances rarely allowed for uninterrupted, focused work with the entire group. The composition of the group changed from session to session, but more importantly, I soon realized that each pupil has experienced a different journey to Finland, to this city, and this school. Their ending up in the same classroom, however, gave birth to a diverse community; a community where cultural and personal difference may become fertile ground for learning and living together. Although diversity is a huge challenge for each pupil and teacher, it can, and maybe should, be considered as a great resource. I agree with Martusewitz, Edmundson and Lupinacci (2015) who consider diversity as the strength of all communities. They define diversity as “*the condition of difference necessary to all life and creativity*” (2015, p. 26). For them,

Diversity is the condition of difference created when there is a relationship between one thing or idea and anything else. When there is a *relationship* there is also *a space for difference* between the two things... difference isn't really *a thing*, or an object, but rather a creative or *generative condition* created because of relationships among things. (2015, p. 26, italics in the original)

The lack of common spoken language heightened the importance of nonverbal communication and embodied interaction. Preparatory class instruction, like approaches to acculturation in general, emphasizes the learning of verbal language. While I acknowledge that language forms the basis for cultural meaning and that language, by and large, mediates between the world and our understanding of it, as Martusewicz, Edmundson and Lupinazzi, (2015) put it, I contest the approach to acculturation that emphasizes spoken, verbal language only. Embodied interaction, when creatively and carefully

nurtured, may at least temporarily generate a space where words are not needed for intersubjective understanding and dialogue. The fleeting encounters and ever-changing circumstances during this intervention may have created a space of not-yet-knowing, or a third space, where something new may emerge (Bhabha, 1994). This kind of pedagogy certainly differs from prescribed curricula and traditional modes of interaction (Freire, 1972) that seem to be still prevailing in many schools. Traditional classroom instruction, as well as questions of inclusion and exclusion make me question how pedagogies have been and continue to be framed, understood and practiced in our society. However, against all odds, I witnessed the arrival to dance, to embodied interaction, encounters in movement. For me, these moments give hope and trust in the possibility of migration towards a place called dance.

EPILOGUE

Ira gathers all pupils and we form a circle on the stage. Rex is still not here. The session ends with throwing a ball around, the one who catches it gets to say one word – any word. It can be anything, so words are random: ball, girl, orange, apple, pen... No one throws it to Max, he becomes extremely impatient. In the end, Ira notices that he did not get to say a word and hands the object to him. Max says: DANCE.

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